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What Are Genuine BMW Parts?

OEM, Genuine, and Aftermarket Explained

The plain-English guide to BMW parts terminology: what each category means, what the differences are, and which to buy.

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What Are Genuine BMW Parts?

Walk into any BMW forum, call any independent garage, or search for any BMW component online and you will encounter three terms used interchangeably — often incorrectly. Genuine. OEM. Aftermarket. These words mean specific and meaningfully different things, and understanding the difference is the single most important piece of knowledge for any BMW owner [buying BMW parts](#).

Get it right, and you pay less than dealer prices for a part that performs identically. Get it wrong, and you buy something cheaper that codes incorrectly, wears faster, or causes the very problem you were trying to fix. This guide explains each category clearly, covers the specific cases where the distinction matters most on BMW models, and tells you which type to choose in which situation.

1. Genuine BMW Parts — What This Actually Means

The term genuine BMW part has a specific meaning in the automotive supply chain. A genuine part is a component that BMW itself sells through its franchised dealer network, packaged in BMW-branded packaging, carrying a BMW part number, and sourced through BMW's official supply chain.

What most people don't know is that BMW does not manufacture most of its own components. BMW designs the specifications, selects the suppliers, and validates the components, but the physical parts are made by specialist manufacturers. The brake callipers in a BMW are made by Brembo or ATE. The engine management system is made by Bosch. The ZF gearbox is made by ZF Friedrichshafen. The Harman Kardon audio system is made by Harman. BMW buys these components from their manufacturers, puts them in BMW-branded packaging, adds a BMW part number, and sells them through the dealer network.

This means that when you buy a genuine BMW part from a dealer, you are buying a component made by the same manufacturer who made the part that came out of your car, but packaged and marked by BMW, and priced to include BMW's retail margin.

What genuine used means

A genuine used BMW part is that same component, same manufacturer, same specification, same part number, removed from a donor BMW rather than purchased new from BMW's supply chain. The BMW branding may be on the part itself, stamped into the casting or printed on a label. The engineering is identical. The fitment is correct. The only difference is that it has mileage on it.

On structural components: headlights, shock absorbers, control arms, steering racks, engines, gearboxes, differentials: mileage does not represent internal degradation in the way that consumable wear items do. A shock absorber from a 35,000-mile written-off BMW has the same internal valve architecture it had when it left the factory. A headlight from a 40,000-mile donor car has the same optics, the same LED arrays, the same adaptive motor. The only question is provenance, where the car came from, what the documented mileage was, and whether the supplier has confirmed those details accurately.

Genuine used parts carry a BMW part number stamped or labelled on the component itself. This is how you confirm you are buying a genuine component rather than an aftermarket one

presented as genuine. If a supplier cannot show you the part number on the component, ask why.

2. OEM Parts — What This Means and Where the Confusion Comes From

OEM stands for Original Equipment Manufacturer. In the automotive context, an OEM part is a component made by the same manufacturer who supplied the original part to BMW, but sold independently of BMW's dealer network, without BMW branding, at a lower price.

Using the brake calliper example: Brembo supplies BMW with brake callipers. Brembo also sells those same callipers, or callipers made to the same specification, directly to the automotive aftermarket under the Brembo name. The component inside the box may be identical or near-identical to the one BMW sells. The difference is the packaging, the price, and the distribution channel.

For straightforward mechanical components where the specification is fully known and the supplier is a reputable name: Brembo, Bosch, Bilstein, Mann, Valeo, ZF, NGK, OEM equivalent parts are a sound choice. The engineering is comparable, the fitment is correct, and the cost is lower than the BMW-branded equivalent.

Where OEM gets complicated on BMW

The OEM term is frequently misused in the used parts market. Sellers sometimes describe a part as OEM when they mean aftermarket, made by a third party to approximately match the original specification, not made by the original supplier. This distinction matters significantly on BMW models for two specific categories of component: electronics and advanced driver assistance systems.

BMW's electronic components: iDrive head units, parking sensor modules, EPS steering racks, Adaptive Damper Control units, camera systems, chassis control modules, are tightly integrated with the car's software architecture. A component that is not the correct specification for that specific car will either not code correctly, generate persistent fault codes, or in some cases not function at all. On these components, genuinely OEM-equivalent means from the same supplier to the same specification. An approximate equivalent does not perform the same way in a BMW application.

For brake pads, air filters, fuel filters, spark plugs, and other consumables where the specification is straightforward and the fitment tolerance is generous, OEM-equivalent parts from trusted suppliers work well and cost less than BMW-branded equivalents.

3. Pattern Parts and Aftermarket — The Third Category

Pattern parts, also called aftermarket parts, are components manufactured by third parties that are designed to fit in place of the original. They are not made by the original supplier. They are not made to BMW's validated specification. They are made to approximate the original's shape, function, and fitment at a lower cost.

At their best, pattern parts are adequate replacements for simple mechanical components where the specification is not critical and the tolerance for variation is wide. A set of wiper

blades, a cabin filter, a set of floor mats: the risk profile of buying aftermarket on these items is low.

At their worst, pattern parts cause the problems they were bought to prevent. A pattern brake disc that doesn't match the original's metallurgical specification may wear faster, generate more dust, or produce vibration under hard braking. A pattern EGR valve that doesn't seal to the same tolerance as the original will leak. A pattern headlight that doesn't meet the original's beam pattern specification is an MOT concern and a safety issue.

The specific risks of pattern parts on modern BMWs

Modern F- and G-generation BMWs are more sensitive to pattern parts than older generations. The reason is software integration. BMW's chassis control systems, Dynamic Stability Control, EDC adaptive dampers, Active Steering, and xDrive torque distribution use sensor data from across the car. Components that don't match the original sensor specification, such as wheel speed sensors, steering angle sensors, yaw rate sensors, and suspension position sensors, can produce incorrect readings that cause the control systems to behave unexpectedly or generate persistent warning lights.

Pattern headlight s are a specific concern on F- and G-generation BMWs with adaptive LED or Laserlight technology. The adaptive function, which turns the beam into corners, relies on a motor and position sensor within the headlight unit. Aftermarket units that approximate the original's shape but don't replicate the motor specification correctly will not adapt correctly and may not code to the car at all.

Pattern airbag components are a category where the risk is not financial but physical. An airbag module that does not meet the original's deployment specification is a safety concern. This is one of the clearest cases where genuine is the only acceptable choice, new or used.

4. Side-by-Side Comparison

	Genuine BMW	OEM equivalent	Pattern/aftermarket
Manufacturer	BMW's validated supplier	Same or equivalent supplier	Third-party manufacturer
Specification	Exactly to BMW spec	Broadly to BMW spec	Approximation of BMW spec
Part number	BMW part number present	Supplier part number	No BMW reference
Fitment	Guaranteed correct	Usually correct	Usually correct
Coding compatibility	Guaranteed	Usually compatible	Variable — risk on electronics
Price	Highest	Mid-range	Lowest
Best for	All components	Consumables, filters, pads	Low-risk consumables only
Avoid for	Nothing	Complex electronics	Sensors, airbags, lighting, ECUs

The table above is a guide, not an absolute rule. The appropriate choice depends on the specific component, the specific supplier, and the context. A pattern oil filter from a reputable brand is a reasonable purchase. A pattern EPS steering rack is not.

5. Which Type to Buy — the Practical Guide

Scenario	Recommended	Why
Engine, gearbox, differential	Genuine used	Structural components — same spec, documented mileage, fraction of new cost
Headlights — LED or adaptive	Genuine used	Aftermarket units often fail to code or adapt correctly on BMW
Shock absorbers — standard	Genuine used or OEM Bilstein	Both are sound choices at lower cost than dealer new
Shock absorbers — EDC/VDC	Genuine used only	Electronic valving must match BMW spec exactly for correct coding
Steering rack — EPS	Genuine used	Motor and torque sensor must be exact spec — aftermarket unreliable
Brake pads	OEM (Brembo, ATE, EBC)	Good quality aftermarket brake pads are entirely appropriate
Brake discs	OEM or genuine used	Metallurgy matters — avoid unknown-brand pattern discs
Control arms (complete)	Genuine used + new bushes	Used arm, always fit new bushes and ball joint
Parking sensors — PDC	Genuine used	Aftermarket sensors often produce false readings or code inconsistently
Air filter, cabin filter	OEM (Mann, Mahle)	Simple specification — reputable OEM brand is fine
Spark plugs	OEM (NGK, Bosch)	Correct heat range is essential — reputable OEM brand matches original
Oil	BMW LL-spec approved	LL-01 or LL-04 as applicable — specification matters, brand less so
Airbag module	Genuine only — new or used from documented donor	Never pattern. Safety-critical component.
ECU / control modules	Genuine used only	Must match exact part number to car's VIN — aftermarket rarely codes
Body panels (wings, doors)	Genuine used or OEM pressed steel	Aftermarket panels often have fitment gaps — genuine used preferred

6. How to Confirm a Part Is Genuine

When buying a used BMW part, confirming it is genuine rather than aftermarket requires a few straightforward checks.

The part number

Every genuine BMW component has a BMW part number. On cast components: engines, gearboxes, control arms, callipers, the number is stamped or cast into the metal. On electronic units and modules, it appears on a label. On lighting, it appears on the rear housing alongside the E-mark type approval number. The part number format is typically eleven digits. You can cross-reference this against RealOEM.com, which is BMW's official parts catalogue made available to the public, using your VIN to confirm the correct number for your specific car.

The supplier

A reputable supplier of used [original BMW parts](#) will be able to tell you the donor vehicle the part came from, the documented mileage of that vehicle, and confirm the part number. An Authorised Treatment Facility permit, required by law for any UK business dismantling vehicles, is a baseline indicator of a legitimate and documented operation.

Supplier markings on the component

Many genuine BMW components carry the name of their original supplier as well as the BMW part number. Bosch, Brembo, Valeo, ZF, Continental, Harman- these names on a component confirm it is a genuine OEM-supplied unit rather than a pattern copy. Aftermarket parts rarely carry these supplier markings because the original suppliers do not authorise their use.

ŪIf a part is listed as genuine BMW but the seller cannot provide the BMW part number and cannot confirm donor vehicle provenance, treat it as unverified. Genuine parts have part numbers. Sellers who know their stock can confirm them.

7. Genuine Parts and BMW Warranty

A common question from BMW owners is whether using non-dealer parts affects their warranty. The answer is clearly established in UK and EU law.

Under the Block Exemption Regulation, BMW cannot void your vehicle warranty solely because you used an independent specialist or non-dealer parts, provided the parts used meet the original specification and the work is carried out correctly. BMW must prove that a non-dealer part caused a specific fault before refusing a warranty claim based on parts choice.

In practice, this means that fitting a quality OEM-equivalent brake pad or a genuine used shock absorber at an independent BMW specialist does not jeopardise your BMW's warranty. Fitting a pattern airbag module or an incorrectly specified ECU would be a different matter, but the reason is component quality, not supplier channel.

For out-of-warranty BMWs, this question is academic: there is no manufacturer warranty to protect. The only warranty that applies is the one offered by the parts supplier and, if applicable, the fitting garage.

Keep service records and parts receipts regardless of where you buy. An independent BMW specialist should stamp the service book and provide a detailed invoice. This documentation protects resale value and demonstrates responsible ownership regardless of where the parts were sourced.

Genuine Used BMW Parts at MT Auto Parts

MT Auto Parts is a BMW breakers yard based in Thurnscoe, South Yorkshire. We break F, G and U-generation BMWs from 2012 onwards. Every part we sell is mostly a genuine BMW part removed from a car we've dismantled ourselves. Every listing states the donor vehicle's mileage. Every part carries a 30-day warranty (T&C apply). And because we only work on BMWs, we understand the specific fitment and coding requirements that make genuine parts the right choice on modern BMW models, and we can tell you before you buy whether the part we have is the right one for your car. Send us your registration or engine code on WhatsApp and we will confirm availability and fitment before anything is dispatched. Over 15,000 five-star reviews. 24 to 48 hours delivery across the UK mainland. Browse BMW parts at mtautoparts.com

Disclaimer: This guide is for general information only. Parts compatibility, specification requirements, and warranty implications vary by model, production date, and application. Always confirm fitment using your VIN and consult a qualified BMW specialist before purchasing parts or undertaking repairs. Prices and part availability change: contact MT Auto Parts directly for current stock and pricing.